

Regal Restoration: The Jonathan Smith House

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

When Barbara and Ernie Heether bought their dream Federal at 45 Cedar Street overlooking the Blue Fish River in a 1993 estate sale, it had only 30-amp service, loose wires hanging from ceilings and walls, no insulation, a basement filled with dirt, plastered walls in disrepair, 16 layers of floor paint on its original wide pine floors, and no septic system. A back ell had long replaced the original keeping room as the main kitchen, yet the appliances and rudimentary design were far less effective than even the home's original 1822 beehive stove.

None of this disheartened the Heethers. They saw only a sturdy fieldstone foundation, intricate molding and wainscoting, carved staircase spindles, bullet glass, walls of built-ins, Victorian bathroom fixtures, wrap around porches, and brick hearth fireplaces in room after room.

What the couple envisioned for the old ship captain's house was a private paradise on 1.6 acres of rolling lawns and manicured landscape. They planned for a restored grape arbor, perennial gardens, brick patios overlooking the river, and a restored carriage house partially converted into a pool house for their new secluded gunitite pool.

In January of 1994, they began the restoration process. The goal was to return the Federal to its former beauty while blending today's modern conveniences. Nothing should distract from the original features chosen by Captain Jonathan Smith in 1822 when he built the house for his wife, Zilpah Drew, and their children.

Five months after the purchase, the Heethers moved in, but there was still more work to be done. It quickly became apparent that the back ell kitchen (a later addition to the original Federal) was not salvageable. The Heethers decided to gut this space.

They completed the addition in two phases. In 1994, they designed and built the 24 x 22 foot kitchen, bathroom and utility room. The kitchen boasts beautiful wood floors to match the main house and an oversized hearth fireplace along with state-of-the-art appliances, skylights and oak cabinets. They extended the existing wrap-around porch by salvaging an original railing found in the carriage house, and replicated the needed remaining railings and decking so the addition's exterior would appear original to the property.

In 2000, the couple added a rear cathedral family room with skylights, another oversized hearth fireplace, built-in bookcases, wet-bar and wine storage. They moved the existing attached garage, restored it and re-attached the 3 car garage to the new back addition.

The couple also insulated the house, put in a new heating system and central air conditioning, upgraded the electricity to two 200-amp panels, removed 16 layers of grey floor paint from all the wide pine floors upstairs, and converted a small bedroom off the master bedroom into a luxurious bathroom with pedestal sink and Jacuzzi tub. They restored all the existing bathrooms with high end Victorian styled fixtures, and re-furnished an existing claw tub for the guest bathroom.

The home's basement is one of the finest examples of

early 1800s workmanship seen in a local Federal. The walls are made of thick layers of fieldstone. There's a bulk head with stairs made of massive slabs of granite, and a center arched brick chimney base. In addition, while digging out the dirt that covered the basement, the Heethers were elated to discover an elaborate brick floor covering the entire space. The floor is reminiscent of brickwork found today in older sections of Boston.

The exposed massive timber construction, center chimney, and walls of stone illustrate the quality building techniques used two hundred years ago. The Heethers have left in place the original coal bin and windowed root cellar room.

Captain Smith built a solid home that would withstand any New England storm during his absence at sea. He was 42 years old, married ten years with four children — Sidney, Sylvanus, Wealtha and Zilpah (Jonathan Jr. was born two years later) — when the couple moved into the house on the hill looking over the Blue Fish River. It was their first home after renting in Duxbury for ten years.

Smith had done well during his career at sea. He was able to pay his father-in-law, Sylvanus Drew, a handsome sum of \$217.50 for the 4 1/3 acres of land, which gave his father-in-law the right to use the existing barn on the property or move it at a later date. The land extended from the river past Cedar Street (which did not exist at the time).

In 1843, at age 63, and two months after the marriage of his daughter Zilpah to Dr. James Wilde, Captain Smith died of consumption. He left the large estate to his wife, Zilpah and her new husband lived in the house with the widow Smith for many years until Zilpah inherited the stately Federal.

The house became known as the Dr. Wilde House, noted Dorothy Wentworth, former town historian. Wilde, a graduate of Harvard in 1832, held a practice in Duxbury for 43 years, and performed several civic duties in town including medical examinations for Civil War recruits, medical care at the Almshouse, and he served on the Board of Health, School Committee and the Board of Trustees for Partridge Academy.

The first known folding hospital bed was made by Dr. Wilde's father for his practice. "It's now displayed in the children's room of the King Caesar House," said Patrick Browne, Executive Director of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society.

Dr. Wilde and his wife Zilpah lived comfortably in the spacious house, with rambling lawns — a perfect spot for their five children, George, J. Lawrence, William B., Catherine and Lucy B.

In 1888, the Wilde daughters, both unmarried and of Boston, inherited the house. Ten years later, the home was the Alden School for girls, and operated as both a day and residential academy. "The campus had tennis courts, croquet grounds, and fine shade trees," wrote Margery MacMillan in *Stopping Places Along Duxbury Roads*.

In the summer months, principal, Helen Nevers, operated a boarding house. "She had a good business sense to utilize what the property offered," said MacMillan, "and her guests must have enjoyed the changing river scene and the wild birds attracted to the area."



Like all men at sea, Captain Smith wrote regularly to his wife, Zilpah Drew Smith. On July 16, 1819, while on board the ship Plato and stationed at Chesapeake Bay, he sent the following message to his wife who was living in a rental property on Washington Street:

"Tell my dear John he must be a good boy and mind his mother, and learn to say his prayers, and I shall give him something when I come home. Tell Sidney that if he is a good boy, I shall try to buy him a dog. Silvanus, I hope will improve in talk and temper before I return, and I hope love me a little better. I shall try to bring him something pretty."

Unfortunately, his son John died the following year at the age of five. Sidney was four years old and Silvanus was age two when Smith wrote the letter.



The original hearth kitchen is today a formal dining room with refurbished glass china cabinets and paneled wainscoting.

JONATHAN SMITH 1822

Location: 45 Cedar Street

Style: Federal Colonial

Living Area: over 4,300 sq. feet

Lot Size: 1.6 acres

Rooms: 12

Baths: 4 1/2

Bedrooms: 6

Fireplaces: 7

Special Historic Features:

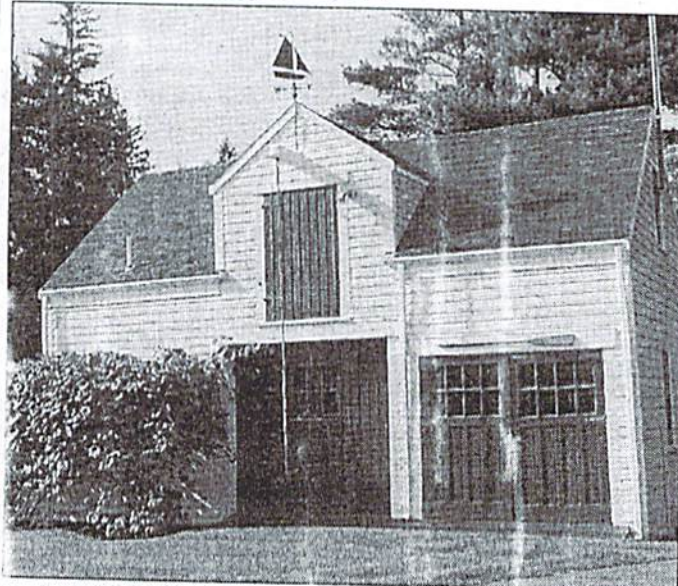
Intricate moldings, wainscoting and built-ins; 5 original fireplaces (plus 2 new) and working beehive stove; bricked basement floor; coal bin and root cellar; Victorian claw tub; original doors, hardware and bullet glass in front door; historic carriage house with original bead board.

Sale Price: \$3,200,000

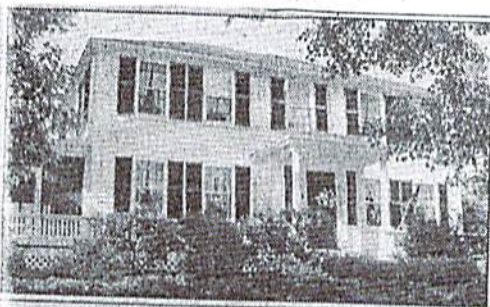
Property Taxes: \$14,352

Listing Broker: Ellen Thurston
781-679-2862

Listed By: Coldwell Banker
Residential Brokerage



Today, the restored carriage house is partially used as a pool house in which two horse stalls were converted into a full bathroom and a changing area.



Located at 45 Cedar Street, The Captain Smith House, a restored Federal on 1.6 acres that was built in 1822, overlooks the Blue Fish River and is currently selling for \$3.2 million.

Photo by D. Katz

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The second floor is graced by this oversized built in bureau/linen closet unit with original hardware.